

3-25-2019

A Political Psychology of Obituary

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2019) "A Political Psychology of Obituary," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 19 : Iss. 3 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol19/iss3/4>

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Title: A Political Psychology of Obituary

Author: Editor

Maya Turovskaya, a Russian film and theater critic, also the co-writer of the documentary frequently translated into English as “Ordinary Fascism” or “Triumph Over Violence” (released in 1965), died on March 4, 2019 in Munich, Germany. Her obituary in *The New York Times* can be read with political psychological implications for her life, the life of others, and the nature of *obituary*.

Her documentary can be manifestly read as about essential features of life under the Nazi totalitarian regime, but latently of life under Stalinist totalitarianism. The shifting in reading from manifest to latent and back again is redolent of Sigmund Freud’s psychology of *dream interpretation* embracing the meta-psychology of inner life. Turovskaya artistically mastered the same for outer life—with direct implications for how propaganda, disinformation, and text in general—drama, poetry, narrative, and the prosody of the everyday—are read and acted on. As with many philosophers—e.g., Descartes—life posited as a dream leads to insight about the life outside of dreaming.

In a 1966 issue of the Soviet literary journal, *Novy Mir* (New World), she critiqued films based on the fictional character James Bond from Ian Fleming’s spy novels. Going beyond describing transparent limitations of formulaic film-making, Turovskaya facilitated readings of the films and their popularity on Henry David Thoreau’s *the mass of men live lives of quiet desperation*. This resonates with Joyce and Robert Hogan’s *hollow core syndrome* often applied to elements of the dark tetrad of personality—viz., narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism—wherein an exciting psychological exterior of confidence and charm masks an interior of self-doubt or even deadness, dullness, and monotony.

In 2008, she received a Nika Award (perhaps, analogous to an Oscar) from the Russian Academy of Cinema Arts and Sciences primarily for her many contributions to film analysis—viz., her readings of films and on the very nature of film. This was just one event in a centuries-long political conflict about the comparative imports of cultural products, cultural context, and critiques of both of them. Literary examples include Matthew Arnold’s “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time (1864) and T. S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1917). Psychological examples include the problematic interactions of findings versus methods—e.g., Kurt Danziger’s *Naming the mind: How psychology found its language* (1997) and *Constructing the subject: Historical origins of psychological research* (1996).

And there is Richard Sandomir’s account of his phone interview about Turovskaya with Olga Gershenson, Professor of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Gershenson attributes to Turovskaya that just because something is observed at the moment, it doesn’t mean it always has been; that everything changes all the time. This not just the philosopher Heraclitus (c. 500 BCE) observing that there’s universal flux; that life is as ever-living fire, kindling in measures

and being quenched in measures; even that opposites coincide, although this latter may change as well. It's also that *obituary* itself waxes and wanes as an end of life, one of myriad summations, an inevitable example of false consciousness and ideological state apparatus to control the living.

So, Maya Turovskaya died at age 94 offering life in death and death in life with many politics of meaning.

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Keywords: Dreams. Film. Hermeneutics. Meaning. Obituary. Turovskaya.

Abstract/Description: This article ascribes political psychological relevance to the recent death of Russian critic and documentarian Maya Turovskaya.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Philosophy of Science. Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations, Film and Media Studies

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